Value-Oriented Hiring and Promotion and the University of San Francisco's Vision 2005

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During the past two years, the University of San Francisco has engaged in the creation of a document entitled Vision 2005, which sets forth the collective vision of the community for the immediate future. Representatives of every constituency of the university have been involved. The first draft of Vision 2005 was distributed in April 1997 and instantly provoked a great deal of conversation and debate. Some of the most heated of the discussions have centered on the section of the report dealing with our Catholic and Jesuit identity.

The draft called for promoting USF’s Catholic and Jesuit identity in a number of ways, but by far the most controversial was its recommendation that questions of institutional identity and mission be brought into play in hiring and promotion processes. Specifically, this section of the document recommended that support of the mission of USF either be a fourth area in consideration for tenure or that it be given weight within each of the other three areas: teaching, research, and service. Further, it recommended that attention to mission and identity be integrated formally into the hiring process. The specifics were to be agreed upon after a university-wide dialogue and discussion of the entire Vision 2005 document.

As a member of the task force that drafted the controversial section of the document, I was surprised and dismayed by a strong, negative reaction the proposal. Almost as soon as the first draft of the document was made available on the internet, we began to hear such comments as, “Now we will all have to go to Mass and Confession,” and, “Next they will want quotas of Catholics on the campus.” As yet, we have not had a campus-wide open dialogue to begin to resolve the controversy, perhaps because emotions are so strong and so polarized. As a proponent of a strong Catholic and Jesuit identity, my desire is to see USF become what it says it is without alienating or disregarding the diversity of viewpoints we have always honored and respected in our community. The fear seems to be that

Kathleen Kane is associate professor of management at the University of San Francisco, McLaren School of Business.
by promoting a strong Catholic and Jesuit identity that USF would be in danger of becoming an institution "for Catholics only."

Is this fear justified? I think not. Granted, as someone only six years into her academic career, I may still have much to learn about the politics of the university. Moreover, as a non-Catholic with no previous experience of Jesuit or Catholic education, I may not have a great deal of historical perspective to draw upon. On the other hand, as a relatively recently hired non-Catholic, for whom USF has been an introduction to Jesuit higher education, my background is similar to that of increasing numbers of my colleagues. And as a professor of organizational behavior and management, my academic training should be of some help. In the comments that follow, then, I shall try to offer what I hope will be a useful—and perhaps fresh—perspective on a complex set of problems.

Some Models

People attach a variety of meanings to the phrase, "hiring and promoting for the mission." To some it means hiring quotas for Catholics and giving special weight to Catholics in the promotion process. To others it means hiring and promoting people who think in similar ways, a kind of "old-boy network" made up of those who have a specific view of what it means to be Catholic and Jesuit. At the other end of the spectrum, it may mean nothing more nor less than attracting and retaining individuals who treat others with respect and who embody in their lives and work values consistent with the religious tradition in which USF stands.

For some, an approach to hiring and promotion similar to the one in place at Pepperdine University would be desirable at USF. The Pepperdine strategy seeks to ensure that a very large percentage of faculty and administrators will be members of the Church of Christ. According to a member of the Pepperdine faculty, the university has recently asked each department to ascertain the number of faculty who are Church of Christ members, and has given each department a target number to attain. Some at USF believe that such a practice could begin to rectify past practices that have, they say, rendered us "no more Catholic than a secular institution." Others at USF consider this practice to be diametrically opposed to Jesuit ideals of tolerance for multiple voices and perspectives, and therefore completely unacceptable as a way to promote our identity. Still others fear that this practice would create a "right-wing" atmosphere in the university, in which discussions and critical thought that were judged "religiously incorrect" would be banned or severely discouraged, with disastrous results for the intellectual life of the university.

Another approach to the promotion of the mission encourages the creation and support of a "critical mass" of thinkers (whether Catholic or not) who are versed in the teachings and history of the Catholic Church. At the moment, USF has a Center for Judaic Studies and is in the process of starting a Center for Islamic Studies, but has no center dedicated to Catholic studies. The chief virtue of this approach, and the reason why I regard it as superior to the Pepperdine model, is that it puts intellectual activity and accomplishment, and not the individual's religious belief, at the center of the issue. It would seem to me that it is entirely appropriate for an institution calling itself Catholic to be a center for research into such subjects as the Catholic intellectual tradition, Catholic social teaching, and the like. Its presence, alongside the Judaic Center and the Islamic Center, would be a concrete expression of the ability of Catholicism to coexist with the university's Catholic commitment to pluralism.

Hiring and promoting for mission can also mean attracting and retaining people of good character, specifically religious questions aside. When UCLA recently invited Michael Milken, the Wall Street "junk bond king," to become a lecturer at its business school, I immediately felt grateful that I worked at a Jesuit business school. I knew that we at the McLaren school would never give institutional support—and the sanction that such support implies—to a man convicted of a variety of illegal financial dealings. Offering a coincidental but telling contrast was the recent visit to USF of Ben Cohen of Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, who spoke to a large, enthusiastic crowd. Ben and Jerry's is known world-wide for its creative and consistent commitment to ethical and socially responsible business practices. I am proud to say that Ben Cohen—not Michael Milken—represents the values we promote in the business school and campus wide. When a colleague recently challenged my view that Milken should be unwelcome at USF, arguing that Jesuit education is also committed to the proposition that all sides of a question must be heard, I realized that it wasn't the mere fact of his presence, but the context in which UCLA presented him, that so offended me. UCLA's invitation appeared to be value-neutral, even approving
and supportive. It was as if Milken had never broken laws or violated ethical standards. In fact, a UCLA dean commented that Milken’s conviction on securities fraud should not preclude him from teaching and that, “We have very mature adult students who can hear different views and decide for themselves.” In a Jesuit university, I would hope that if he had been invited, the visit would have been framed in such a way that there would be no doubt that the institution did not condone his crimes, or regard them as “business-as-usual.”

Applying the “Ben and Michael” issue to the hiring process, one would hope that a Ben Cohen, because he exemplifies the ethical and moral behavior we associate with our mission, would be viewed as a much more desirable colleague than a Michael Milken. I have heard comments at USF to the effect that acting ethically is “nice, but not enough,” as if good acts are “enough” only if grounded explicitly in Catholic theology. But treating others with respect, I submit, must be at the heart of whatever we define Jesuit mission to be. And loving one’s neighbor is not an exclusive franchise of any denomination.

Value-Oriented Hiring and Promotion

USF’s mission statement is an inspirational document explicating values that are noble and easy to accept at face value. During the last two years, as a member of the President’s Council for the Mission of the University, I have become increasingly concerned with the question of how to put those values into practice. Is there consensus in the community about our values and about how those values should shape our relationships with each other and the San Francisco community? Is the USF culture one that supports the everyday living of those values? Should we institute a kind of value-oriented hiring and promotion process in order to strengthen our culture in support of our mission?

In companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Toyota, Disney, and Microsoft, specific personnel and hiring practices have been instituted which insure that the organization hire only those who accept and practice the values and principles promoted by the company and its existing organizational culture. This has been an effective way to insure a good fit between employees and the company vision. In addition, it has created strong organizational cultures with dedicated and com-
mitted employees. The troubling aspect of this practice is that it can serve to perpetuate a kind of "old-boy network." It has the potential to create an insulated and isolated organization that could easily lose touch with the customers it was created to serve.

The question then is this: Can USF institute a value-oriented approach without compromising the diversity and pluralism to which we are committed? I believe that our first task is to think and talk about those values and what they mean in how we actually do our work. Ideally, each member of the community would attempt to discover the meaning of the mission in his or her own professional life. This year, while writing a personal statement for my tenure file, I described the ways in which my teaching, research, and service supported USF’s mission and how the mission supported my personal values and goals for my academic career. It was a valuable exercise in many ways, but the important outcome was the validation of my sense that USF was the right place for me to continue and ultimately complete my academic career, particularly as USF continues to move closer to its mission as a Catholic and Jesuit institution.

An essay by Fr. Robert Mitchell, S.J., now president of LeMoyne College in Syracuse, N.Y., delineates these five traits of Jesuit Education: a passion for quality and excellence; the study of the humanities and sciences, no matter the specialization; a preoccupation with questions of ethics and values for both the professional and personal lives of students; the importance of the religious experience, for both Catholic and non-Catholic students; and the importance of and attendance to the individual needs of each student. With explicit, but non-restrictive, value-oriented criteria such as these, we have a clear framework for integrating our values into our personnel processes.

Just as I completed a value-oriented assessment of myself as an applicant for tenure, I strongly advocate some manner of value-oriented assessment in the hiring and promotion processes. Administration and faculty need to work out the specifics, but I believe that it is essential to the well-being of the community as well as of each faculty member. Of all the jobs I have held in my life, including starting a business, being a junior faculty member was by far the most difficult to feel comfortable with. The first few years were fraught with uncertainty: How much of my time do students need? How much can I afford to give them? How much service time should be devoted to my department? to the business school? to the university? Where does research fit into the mix? A value-oriented approach can help assure that applicants understand clearly what USF stands for, and how they can contribute. It can reduce at least some of that initial uncertainty, enabling new faculty members to be assimilated more quickly and effectively into university life. It can also allow the university to be more selective in its choice of faculty, as it gives prospective faculty members the opportunity to assess their own fit with the institution.

To the proposal that we explicitly screen candidates for values and beliefs congruent with the mission, I often hear the response, “People will say anything to get the job.” Perhaps this is true of some, but I prefer to assume the goodwill and honest intentions of job applicants and trust that, if presented with clear options, most will make a choice congruent with their own values. It is possible that hiring errors in the past may be attributed more to a lack of clarity about mission than to the dishonesty of the candidates.

Can a hiring process detect candidates of good character? I believe it can, if the institution is clear about how that character can be revealed in various aspects of institutional life. Can a tenure and promotion process include criteria directly related to the mission? In my own case, I was able to link my entire tenure package to the mission of the university. It certainly did not hurt my case, and I believe that it helped, especially with certain constituencies. Most importantly, it helped give a focus and coherence to my personal statement and file by grounding them in a strong set of values and ideals. Again, the details and relative weights of mission-related criteria need to be discussed and in the USF case made part of the collective bargaining process. I hope that we may soon engage in this discussion with an openness to the possibilities inherent in this approach.

Questions remain: Are we a recognizably unique institution with something special to offer our students and society in general? What is that “something special”? What will we do in the future to demonstrate and live this unique character? Who will be willing and able to carry forward this unique character and vision for the future? I believe that I have begun to answer these questions for myself, but I also believe that the community must commit itself to open dialogue and conversation. This will take courage. These conversations will require mutual respect, the ability to negotiate and compromise, and a spirit of inclusion. They will require, that is, that we love our neighbors.